



PRIEST  
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ORTHODOX  
UPBRINGING  
OF  
CHILDREN

XI

• HOW TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE •

Approved for distribution by the Publishing  
Board of the Russian Orthodox Church  
PB 13-314-2075

32 pp. Priest Daniel Sysoev. Orthodox Upbringing of Children.  
Daniel Sysoev Inc, New Jersey, 2018.

ISBN: 978-5-4279-0083-0

The prototypical father is God, just as the mother must model her parenting after the Mother Church. Holy Scripture never permits a person to arrange his life "on autopilot": it requires that every action a person takes, particularly those of importance such as the relationship between children and parents, be arranged on the basis of the commands of the Lord God Himself. If we consult the Word of God, there we find a number of very severe passages regarding how parents are to treat their children and vice versa. This book takes a comprehensive look at this issue and provides considerable practical advice on the Orthodox upbringing of children.

*Booklet 11 of 12 from a series of talks given by Priest  
Daniel Sysoev entitled "How to Inherit Eternal Life."*

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# CONTENT

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## THE ORTHODOX UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

Family Relationships in the Bible .....	4
Authority for Parents in the Upbringing of Children.....	8
True Discipline is Teaching .....	9
How Children Should Treat Their Parents ...	12
The Child's Environment .....	14
Teaching Children Basic Principles of Christianity.....	17
The Value of Education.....	20
Attending the Church of God .....	23
Particularities of Bringing Up Daughters ...	24
Important Points in the Upbringing of Children.....	25
On Prayer Life in the Family .....	27

# THE ORTHODOX UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

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## Family Relationships in the Bible

When we speak of the relationships of parents and children it is very important to remember the many norms of Holy Scripture, and to understand the origins of fatherhood and motherhood. The prototypical father is God. The apostle Paul says, *Of Whom* [that is, of God the Father] *the whole family in heaven and earth is named* (Eph. 3:15); that is, an earthly father must take his example from God the Father. He does this in the same way that the mother models her parenting after the Mother Church. Holy Scripture never permits a person to arrange his life "on autopilot": it requires that every action a person takes—particularly one so important as the relationship between children and parents—be grounded in the commands of the Lord God Himself. If we consult the Word of God we find a number of very severe passages on parental treatment of children and vice versa.

The Lord says, *If a man have two wives, one be-*

*loved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear (Deut. 21:15–21).* The first thing we see is that Holy Scripture forbids playing favorites: this must be stopped. Frequently people say that children in the family should be brought up with love, but the Word of God says that children should be

brought up on the basis of justice. The firstborn, as he who is responsible for the rest, is set apart: he receives a double portion. Before the advent of the Levite priesthood it was the firstborn who offered the sacrifices: they served as the priests of God.

Relations between parents and children must be grounded in justice and, naturally, in love. The holy apostle Paul has this to say on the matter: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* (Eph. 6:1–4). As you see, once again we have the same principle of justice, proceeding from Holy Scripture, which demands that justice triumph in any situation. Today quite frequently this principle is violated: children control their parents through tantrums, the wife attempts to control her husband, the husband forces his wife to break God's commandments, etc. In other words, instead of justice, manipulation is now becoming widespread. The holy apostle Paul cites the fifth commandment, which alone out of the ten gives a promise (the other commandments threaten a person): *Honour thy father and thy mother:*

*that thy days may be long upon the land* (Ex. 20:12).

But we must listen to our parents, as long as their words do not contradict Holy Scripture. If however our parents demand that we violate the will of God—by asking us to steal something, for example, or to have an abortion, or other things of this sort—we must not listen to them. In these situations we must cut off all their attempts to interfere. Further on Scripture says, *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4). This is a brief commandment given to fathers, because it is presumed that in family life the father must be the one in charge. In our own country, boys are usually raised by their mothers, which is an absurd, anti-biblical approach. The father must create conditions in which the family is able to properly function. The biblical expression “provoke not your children” means that one must not lose one’s temper with them. From these words of Scripture a general conclusion may be drawn: you may and must discipline your children, but you must never punish them if you are angry, because if you strike a child in anger this means that you are not disciplining him (that is, you are not training him), but are simply venting your anger. For this very reason Scripture presumes that the right to punish belongs

exclusively to the father, because the father is more rational than emotional, this being typical of men.

Children must absolutely be instructed in the teaching of the Lord. In the Old Testament there was a very ancient tradition of fathers reading the Word of God to their children. One may also recall accounts of pious merchants and noblemen: the children would gather around their father and he would open the family Bible, which was handed down from generation to generation over the centuries, and he would read to them the Word of God. This is a marvelous and excellent tradition, and in many ways it is the core of upbringing, since here a person is guided not by his own authority.

### **Authority for Parents in the Upbringing of Children**

The chief argument that parents have in the process of bringing up children is to cite the Word of God: "God said so; be so good as to obey Him." Parents are the transmitters of the Revelation of the Living God, and they relay the Word of God. When we read the book of Proverbs we see that Solomon says, *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about*



*thy neck* (Prov. 1:8–9). The general principle of a Christian comes down to the fact that God must speak through parents, and parents must speak in God's name. The apostle Peter says, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God* (1 Pet. 4:11). For this reason foul language is a sin, where a person forsakes the Word of God and begins to speak the words of the devil. Rather, we must speak the words of God, so that our speech might be permeated by Holy Scripture. As Seraphim of Sarov said, "Our mind must swim in Holy Scripture," for then our speech will be in keeping with this.

### **True Discipline is Teaching**

The apostle Paul says that fathers must not provoke their children, but must bring them up in the teaching and instruction of the Lord. Thus, discipline is firstly teaching, and secondly punishment. In admonishing a child, in punishing him, we do not merely tell him, "You misbehaved—take that!" Rather, we explain what he did wrong. This will be true discipline, in the sense of teaching. And the child will not merely have this or that road barred to him, but will be shown another way that he must follow. This is a very important principle. It is acknowledged even by secular psy-

chology, which claims that today there is a widespread and highly negative situation in which a person is offered nothing but taboos. If you take the Word of God you will see that there are more positive commands there than negative, especially in the Gospel. Practically everywhere the Lord says, "Do this" or "Do that," and this is the principle of God the Father Himself, who teaches you and me in exactly this way, showing us the way in which we must not walk and the way in which we must. It is important to understand what happens when fathers and mothers forget this. King David wrote the excellent seventy-seventh psalm, in which God explicitly expresses His desire: *Give heed, O my people, to my law; incline your ear unto the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter dark sayings which have been from the beginning, even those things that we have heard and have known and which our fathers have told us. They were not hid from their children in another generation. They declared the praises of the Lord and His mighty acts and His wonders which He wrought. And He raised up a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, even those things He had commanded our fathers, to make the same known unto their children, that another generation might know, even the sons about to*

*be born, that they in turn might arise and declare them unto their sons, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but seek after His commandments, that they might not be as their fathers, a generation perverse and provoking, a generation that set not their heart aright, and which kept not their spirit steadfast with God (Ps. 77:1–8).* This is the explicit law of God.

There have been instances—and the Bible emphasizes them quite clearly and vividly—when this law was broken. For example, after the death of Joshua the son of Nun and those who entered the Holy Land with him, the Hebrews promptly began to worship other gods—Baal, Astarte, and others. Why? The book of Judges emphasizes: “Because that generation is gone, and children that are untaught have arisen.” The children who saw the wonders of God with their own eyes did not take the trouble to relate this to their own children. The Word of God must come from the father, but mothers also must read the Gospel to children at bedtime. In this way a person listens to Holy Scripture from the very beginning of his life. The mother, being more emotional, must tell her children about Christian life using examples from the lives of the saints. This principle must be observed from the very earliest years. We must bring up children in such a way that

they will know how to establish their own lives in the right paths. The holy apostle Paul says, *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged* (Col. 3:18–21). The task of parents is to see that they do not let their children fall into despondency and a state of melancholy. One of the saddest things we see happening today is the conflicts that flare up between fathers and children in the period of adolescence. Most difficult of all in this period is that parents do not know how to overcome despondency and melancholy in their children, as the apostle Paul requires.

### **How Children Should Treat Their Parents**

Scripture says, *Hear me your father, O children, and do thereafter, that ye may be safe. For the Lord hath given the father honour over the children, and hath confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons. Whoso honoureth his father maketh an atonement for his sins: and he that honoureth his mother is as one that layeth up treasure. Whoso honoureth his father shall have joy of his own children; and*

*when he maketh his prayer, he shall be heard. He that honoureth his father shall have a long life; and he that is obedient unto the Lord shall be a comfort to his mother. He that feareth the Lord will honour his father, and will do service unto his parents, as to his masters. Honour thy father and mother both in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon thee from them. For the blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations. Glory not in the dishonour of thy father; for thy father's dishonour is no glory unto thee. For the glory of a man is from the honour of his father; and a mother in dishonour is a reproach to the children. My son, help thy father in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth. And if his understanding fail, have patience with him; and despise him not when thou art in thy full strength. For the relieving of thy father shall not be forgotten: and instead of sins it shall be added to build thee up (Ecclus. 3:1—14).* Here it is emphasized that the authority to judge is from God, that parents must always be treated well, and that for this the Lord will multiply your possessions and your strength, even if you have many sins.

*For the relieving of thy father shall not be forgotten: and instead of sins it shall be added to build thee up. In the day of thine affliction it shall*

*be remembered; thy sins also shall melt away, as the ice in the fair warm weather. He that forsaketh his father is as a blasphemer; and he that angereth his mother is cursed of God* (Ecclus. 3:14–16). It is simply essential that we know these words. We see that Scripture says explicitly why children do not obey: you did not obey your parents yourself, and this is God's retribution. Conversely, one who honors his parents, who prays for them, and who supports them will naturally be blessed of God. Indeed, a grievous sin lies upon our nation: we have homes for the elderly where people discard their parents like useless rubbish. This is a great sin in the eyes of God, for which God naturally rewards people with a short life. *For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death* (Mk. 7:10). In the Old Testament this kind of person was to be burned alive. The missionary Father Oleg Stenyaev related that in Chechnya those who abused their parents were the most likely to burn to death in tanks.

## **The Child's Environment**

With whom the child associates is a very important matter, as well as with whom his parents as-

sociate. As the apostle Paul says, *Bad company corrupts good character* (1 Cor. 15:33 NIV). The Word of God explicitly requires that we choose our friends carefully. Observe what Scripture says concerning this: *Who will pity a charmer that is bitten with a serpent, or any such as come nigh wild beasts? So one that goeth to a sinner, and is defiled with him in his sins, who will pity? For a while he will abide with thee, but if thou begin to fall, he will not tarry. An enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips, but in his heart he imagineth how to throw thee into a pit: he will weep with his eyes, but if he find opportunity, he will not be satisfied with blood. If adversity come upon thee, thou shalt find him there first; and though he pretend to help thee, yet shall he undermine thee. He will shake his head, and clap his hands, and whisper much, and change his countenance* (Ecclus. 12:13–18). Scripture explicitly says that there are friends and then there are enemies. Beware of enemies: if misfortune occurs it will be your own fault. We must likewise teach our children to know how to tell good from evil, so that they know with whom to associate and with whom not to, and how to make their own decisions after careful consideration. The child's conscience must reveal to him who is wrong about what.

This is a very important principle. People tell

us that we must not judge anyone; consequently we may associate with whomever we please. This is not true. Scripture explicitly prohibits associating with sinners. During a house blessing and each time at the end of the first hour we read Psalm 100, in which we hear: *I will chant and have understanding in a blameless path. When wilt Thou come unto me? I have walked in the innocence of my heart in the midst of my house. I have no unlawful thing before mine eyes; the workers of transgressions I have hated. A crooked heart hath not cleaved unto me; as for the wicked man who turned from me, I knew him not. Him that privily talked against his neighbour did I drive away from me. With him whose eye was proud and his heart insatiate, I did not eat. Mine eyes were upon the faithful of the land, that they might sit with me; the man that walked in the blameless path, he ministered unto me. The proud doer dwelt not in the midst of my house; the speaker of unjust things prospered not before mine eyes. In the morning I slew all the sinners of the land, utterly to destroy out of the city of the Lord all them that work iniquity* (Ps. 100:2–8). A person must choose his friends on the following basis: he must cut off the proud, the envious, and the haughty, and he must end all contact with slanderers, lest they devour us. If we allow a slanderer to fill our



ears with slander, the next victim of his backbiting will be you. And this will be unto you from God, because you will receive your recompense from Him, having dared to break the ninth commandment: *Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour* (Deut. 5:20). This is the basis on which we must teach our children to choose their friends. This is actually an excellent time to read and discuss the didactic books with little ones—the book of Proverbs by King Solomon, the book of Joshua the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), the book of Ecclesiastes, and the book of Psalms.

## **Teaching Children Basic Principles of Christianity**

It is very important to teach children to do charitable work. When parents go to the church of God they should give their children money, so that they become accustomed to give alms, and so that this happens for them automatically. From the viewpoint of the Bible, the highest form of relationship between men is not even the relationship between husband and wife (which is inimitable and unique in its own way), but the relationship between friends. This is the pure flowering of ideas; it is, if you will, a wholly spiritual affair; but here danger

also lurks. Concerning this Scripture says, *Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fairspeaking tongue will increase kind greetings* (Ecclus. 6:5). It is important to teach children to have pleasant speech and a kind tongue, that they might learn not to quarrel, not to fight, not to reproach the people around them, but to praise them if they deserve this. *Be in peace with many: nevertheless have but one counsellor of a thousand* (Ecclus. 6:6). The principle that we must teach our children is very simple. *If thou wouldest get a friend, prove him first and be not hasty to credit him* (Ecclus. 6:7). Children need to be taught this from the outset. *For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity, and strife will discover thy reproach. Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction. But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants. If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies, and take heed of thy friends* (Ecclus. 6:8–13). It is important to maintain a happy medium: if a person thinks all men are scoundrels he is bound to remain a friendless loner. Conversely, if he thinks all men are good, that person may

be betrayed and badly hurt. Scripture should be understood as it is written, because the Lord is wiser than us, and He has a superb knowledge of human nature.

*A faithfull friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure. Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable. A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright: for as he is, so shall his neighbour be also* (Ecclus. 6:14–17). This is a very important biblical principle. The first thing we must teach a child is the fear of God: *To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Ecclus. 1:15). Scripture speaks of this many times in both the Old and New Testaments. We must teach children to have reverence for God, and so we ought not to let children run around in the church; rather, they should stand at attention. If children are unable to stand for long it is better to let them run around outside the church, then catch their breath in the narthex and enter the church, rather than making it hard for others to pray and losing their own sense of reverence. It is absolutely impermissible to lie to little children at Holy Communion. It sometimes happens that people bring a little child to Communion and say,

"Let's go have a bite of something sweet." This is outright blasphemy—to call the Body and Blood of the Lord "something sweet." The child should be told the truth: "God will enter you; God will come to you."

## **The Value of Education**

*My son, gather instruction from thy youth up: so shalt thou find wisdom till thine old age. Come unto her as one that ploweth and soweth, and wait for her good fruits: for thou shalt not toil much in labouring about her, but thou shalt eat of her fruits right soon. She is very unpleasant to the unlearned: he that is without understanding will not remain with her. She will lie upon him as a mighty stone of trial; and he will cast her from him ere it be long. For wisdom is according to her name, and she is not manifest unto many. Give ear, my son, receive my advice, and refuse not my counsel, and put thy feet into her fetters, and thy neck into her chain. Bow down thy shoulder, and bear her, and be not grieved with her bonds. Come unto her with thy whole heart, and keep her ways with all thy power. Search, and seek, and she shall be made known unto thee: and when thou hast got hold of her, let her not go. For at the last thou shalt find her rest,*

*and that shall be turned to thy joy. Then shall her fetters be a strong defence for thee, and her chains a robe of glory. For there is a golden ornament upon her, and her bands are purple lace. Thou shalt put her on as a robe of honour, and shalt put her about thee as a crown of joy. My son, if thou wilt, thou shalt be taught: and if thou wilt apply thy mind, thou shalt be prudent. If thou love to hear, thou shalt receive understanding: and if thou bow thine ear, thou shalt be wise, stand in the multitude of the elders; and cleave unto him that is wise. Be willing to hear every godly discourse; and let not the parables of understanding escape thee. And if thou seest a man of understanding, get thee betimes unto him, and let thy foot wear the steps of his door. Let thy mind be upon the ordinances of the Lord and meditate continually in his commandments: he shall establish thine heart, and give thee wisdom at thine owns desire (Ecclus. 6:18—37).*

One must study wisdom always, preferably beginning in early childhood. If a child says he does not want to study you should reply that if he wants to be stupid and uneducated he may choose not to study, but then his parents will not feed him. This is described in the proverb about how he who does not desire wisdom becomes poor and will go begging on the street corners. We need to know

that there is no wisdom without God; this is nonsense. One need never be embarrassed of calling evil deeds evil. This is a universal biblical principle. God says, *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (Is. 5:20). For this reason we must call things as they are, so that a child knows what is good and what is evil. It is important that he develop the habit of turning to the Word of God for advice. Teach him to go with you to important meetings, only do not allow him to interrupt you, so that he learns to respect people. Remember what Scripture says: *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man* (Lev. 19:32). Then the child will succeed in life.

In accordance with God's will the authority to teach belongs to two communities only: the family, where the father and mother must teach, and the Church. As for secular institutions of learning, they are beneficial if they provide wisdom, and detrimental if they corrupt the students. From this we should conclude that it is important to pay attention to what is being taught in the schools.

How should the television be viewed? Some say it is best to get rid of it. Agreed, but unfortunately in practice very few are able to do so. Does

this mean that television is evil in and of itself? No, television is not evil, just as a voice recorder, a camera, a cell phone, the internet, or a computer is not evil. The evil lies in how it is used. Consequently, you must give your children the criteria for using television. I recall how my oldest daughter wanted very badly to watch *Harry Potter*, at the height of the Pottermania. In the line of duty I had read *Harry Potter* from beginning to end, since I often visit schools and am constantly asked about it. I allowed her to watch it, but only together with me, and in this way we analyzed together what was good about it and what was not. Parents must categorically prohibit watching commercials, because all commercials are designed to program a person.

## **Attending the Church of God**

Through the mouth of the apostle Paul on the day of Pentecost, the Lord said that *the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call* (Acts 2:39). On the basis of these words the Church has always baptized children. The Lord also says, *Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God* (Mk.

10:14). Children must be taught so that the church of God becomes a place of honor for them. I think it is a very good thing for a child to begin attending a different church (one other than the one his parents attend)—this means he is going to church to please not his parents, but God. The main thing is that the church be not merely a place to meet with his friends, for at times children go to church merely to visit with each other, and pay no attention to the service whatsoever. Here we must remember that small children are not able to pray for long: their religious feelings are strong, but of short duration. Hence, if you go to church with a child you should cross yourself together with him, enter the church, venerate an icon, light a candle, stand a while, and then let him run around outside. Then at "Our Father" or the Creed, toward the time for Communion, he should come back, calm down, and go to commune.

### **Particularities of Bringing Up Daughters**

*The father waketh for the daughter, when no man knoweth; and the care for her taketh away sleep: when she is young, lest she pass away the flower of her age; and being married, lest she should be hated: in her virginity, lest she should be defiled and*



*gotten with child in her father's house; and having an husband, lest she should misbehave herself; and when she is married, lest she should be barren. Keep a sure watch over a shameless daughter, lest she make thee a laughingstock to thine enemies, and a byword in the city, and a reproach among the people, and make thee ashamed before the multitude (Ecclus. 42:9—11).* This is the warning of Joshua the son of Sirach, but as you see it is quite prudent.

## **Important Points in the Upbringing of Children**

It is very important to understand that the task of parents is to determine for their child the task that God has given him. Holy Scripture says that God the Father foreknew every person before the creation of the world. Consequently, the task of parents and priests is to understand the destiny for their particular child. Each person is a little riddle, and that riddle must be solved. Quite frequently in families parents take the following position: "We were doctors, so you must also be a doctor." A tremendous number of lives are ruined this way. The task of parents, if they love their children, is to determine what is best suited to their child. Here it

is essential to examine the abilities and talents of one's children. To accomplish this, a person must see his child through God's eyes, and to do this they must pray together. There is also a problem where boys grow up but remain incapable of becoming men. There are people who remain adolescents by disposition until their twenties, their forties, or even into old age. This is naturally a true tragedy of our time. From early childhood boys should be made to make decisions and answer for them. The earlier they begin to do this, the better.

Both obedience and responsibility are needed; one must be able to combine these two. This of course is the riddle of our life. For we too must be absolutely free children of God and, at the same time, absolutely obedient to God. If we have obedience without freedom we become slaves, as in Israel: there on the Sabbath the elevator stops at every floor, so that they do not have to work by pressing the button to open the doors. We of course have no need of this; this is Talmudism, and nothing good comes from it. This is an example of obedience without freedom. Freedom without obedience is also a bad thing. Today people say, "God is only love; He does not punish anyone. I do whatever I please; God will save me regardless." This is complete discord without faith: everything

is lost—reverence, the fear of God, love, and just about everything else. Thus, both must be present. This is true both for us and for our children. We must perceive children as people who serve God, while parents are appointed to be their helpers on this path. With good reason at the rite of the sacrament of baptism, after the churching, the Typicon calls for the child to be laid upon a mat before the altar, after which he is taken up from the hands of God. The mother kneels and she is given the child, as a sign that this person belongs to her no longer, but to God. He is only given to the parents to be brought up.

### **On Prayer Life in the Family**

Prayer life must accompany the child always. We have forgotten the resources that the Church provides to us. There is the prayer of the first day. At times one would think that no one is having children these days, though people bring newborns to be baptized. But in actuality the day the child is born the father must come to the priest, so that he can read the prayer of the first day. On the eighth day the name is given—somehow we have forgotten this as well. Everything ends up being done right before the baptism. The child, as we know,

must be communed as often as possible. He must be given holy water to drink and bathed in holy water. Burning incense is also a very good thing. The book of Numbers relates how God's visitation befell the Hebrews for their sin: God sent a destroying angel upon the people, but Moses begged God to spare them, and he commanded Aaron to take a censer and stand between the dead and the living, and the smoke from the censer stopped the destroying angel on his way to kill the Hebrew people.

For this reason it is important to burn incense by the child's bed, so that his guardian angel might watch over him. Children must be taught to sing prayers from early childhood. Quite frequently people attempt to teach children to read prayers, but this is actually extremely difficult. Orthodox children must learn to pray by singing, not by reading. This is easier to remember and sinks in better. Frequently one encounters two extremes with regard to morning and evening prayers. Some are of the opinion that a child will begin to read them on his own when he is older. But this is not the case: he will naturally do no such thing, as you of course realize. Then there is another extreme: making the child read all the morning and evening prayers in their entirety. It does not matter that he does not

understand a word; the main thing is that he read them. The result is that when he reaches adolescence he will read nothing at all. The conclusion is quite simple: everything must develop naturally. If he is very small, have him say, "O Lord, help me! Mother of God, protect me! Guardian angel, help me!"—that is, the shortest prayers of all. A little later he should sing—not read—"Our Father," "O Theotokos Virgin, Rejoice," the Creed, and "It is Truly Meet." Then, when the child starts becoming self-aware, at four or five years old, he should begin to pray for his parents. And so it goes, gradually adding one thing at a time, little by little, not piling on everything at once, but gradually, and doing so based on his abilities. I can tell you that children value it most of all when their fathers pray with them. The impression is completely different. When mama prays with them it is an everyday affair, but when it is their father it is another matter. To this day I remember whole chapters from the Old and New Testament that my father read to me, though I was only seven or eight years old at the time. He read to me in Russian, but I was reading Slavonic by the time I was six. This is what is most important.

Remember that the main task of parents is to guide their children toward holiness, so that

your children become not merely good people, but righteous and holy. This is what they must be taught to strive for. For this you must pray to God yourselves in addition to teaching them holiness, constantly raising the bar. Our problem is that parents lower this bar. "Oh well; at least do this much." We should say, "What, you can't even do such a little thing? Why, you can do far more!" This is the right approach: raising the bar means not increased self-esteem, but the realization that by God's will a person is able to a great deal. But we must always add that God will help you, because if we do not it will lead to pridefulness. As the apostle Paul says, *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 3:14). This is the path that we must lay out for them

As the child grows the fasts should be gradually intensified. One must explain to the child why fasting is necessary, so that he boasts of the fasts. Boasting is permissible. The Bible says explicitly: *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness,*

*in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord* (Jer. 9:23–24). The Bible teaches us to boast of God. Let your child learn to boast, but properly: "I am a Christian! I boast and am proud of this! Let he who is not a Christian be ashamed of not being one! Shame on you for being a non-Christian!" Sooner or later the Christian child finds himself the odd man out, but this is normal. The Lord said, *I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you* (Jn. 15:19). If we are chosen, then glory to God, we are not ashamed of this. As Abba Apollonius would say, if he happened to see a gloomy face, "Let the pagans mourn, let the Christ-killing Jews lament, but we the saved ought to rejoice, because the Lord has saved us." Hence, we must boast of being Christians. When people say, "Shame on you for being Christians!" we must answer, "Shame on you, rather, for being atheists!" This is the proper approach.

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ORTHODOX UPBRINGING  
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Except where otherwise noted, scriptural quotes are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. Quotes from the book of Psalms are taken from *The Psalter According to the Seventy*, published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline MA; all rights reserved.

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